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# HISTORIAN OF THE NORTHWEST.

A WOMAN WHO LOVED OREGON.

By WILLIAM A. MORRIS, A.B.

(From Pamphlet "In Memoriam.")

Poems, 1851.

Florence Fane Sketches, 1863-65.

The River of the West, 1870.

All Over Oregon and Washington, 1872.

Woman's War Against Whisky, 1874.

The New Penelope, 1877.

Bancroft History of Oregon, 2 vols., 1886.

Bancroft History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

Bancroft History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming.

Bancroft History of California, vols. 6 and 7.

History of Early Indian Wars in Oregon, 1893.

Atlantis Arisen.

Poems, 1900.

By the death, on November 14th, of Frances Fuller Victor there was removed the most versatile figure in Pacific Coast literature, a literary pioneer on the coast, and a woman to whom Oregonians owe much. Frances Fuller was born in the township of Rome, New York, May 23, 1826, and had, therefore, reached the ripe age of seventy-six years. She was a near relation of Judge Ruben H. Walworth, Chancellor of the State of New York. Through her ancestor, Lucy Walworth, wife of Veach Williams, who lived at Lebanon, Connecticut, in the early part of the eighteenth century, she could trace her descent from Egbert, the first King of England, while Veach Williams himself was descended from Robert Williams, who came over from England in 1637 and settled at Roxbury, Massachusetts.

When Mrs. Victor was thirteen years of age her parents moved to Wooster, Ohio, and her education was received at a young ladies' seminary at that place. From an early age she took to literature and when but fourteen years old wrote both prose and verses for the county papers. A little later the *Cleveland Herald* paid for her poems, some of which were copied in English journals.

Mrs. Victor's younger sister, Metta, who subsequently

married a Victor, a brother of Frances' husband, was also a writer of marked ability. Between the two a devoted attachment existed, and in those days the two ranked with Alice and Phoebe Carey, the four being referred to as Ohio's boasted quartet of sister poets. The Fuller sisters contributed verses to the *Home Journal*, of New York City, of which N. P. Willis and George P. Morris were then the editors. Metta was known as the "Singing Sybil." In eulogy of the two sisters, N. P. Willis at this time writes concerning them :

One in spirit and equal in genius, these most interesting and brilliant ladies—both still in earliest youth—are undoubtedly destined to occupy a very distinguished and permanent place among the native authors of this land.

In her young womanhood Frances spent a year in New York City amid helpful literary associations. Being urged by their friends, the two sisters published together a volume of their girlhood poems in 1851. In the more rigorous self-criticism of later years Mrs. Victor has often called it a mistaken kindness which induced her friends to advise the publication of these youthful productions ; but in these verses is to be seen the true poetic principle, and their earnestness is especially conspicuous.

Metta Fuller Victor, after her marriage, took up her residence in New York City, and continued her literary work both in prose and in verse until her death, a number of years ago. Frances' husband, Henry C. Victor, was a naval engineer and was ordered to California in 1863. She accompanied him and for nearly two years wrote for the San Francisco papers, her principal contributions consisting of city editorials to the *Bulletin*, and a series of society articles under the *nom de plume* of Florence Fane, which, we are told, by their humorous hits, elicited much favorable comment.

About the close of the war Mr. Victor resigned his position and came to Oregon, where his wife followed him in

1865. She has often told how, upon her first arrival in this state, she recognized in the type both of the sturdy pioneers of Oregon and of their institutions something entirely new to her experience, and at once determined to make a close study of Oregon. As she became acquainted with many of the leading men of the state, and learned more and more about it, she determined to write its history, and began to collect material for that purpose. In doing this she performed a service of inestimable value to the state, since our state builders were then nearly all alive, and facts concerning the beginnings of the state were well known to them, which, had it not been for Mrs. Victor's efforts, would have been lost to posterity.

Her first book on the history of Oregon was "The River of the West," a biography of Joseph L. Meek, which was published in 1870. Many middle-aged Oregonians tell what a delight came to them when in boyhood and girlhood days they read the stories of Rocky Mountain adventures of the old trapper Meek, as recited by this woman of culture and literary training, who herself had taken so great an interest in them. The book was thumbed and passed from hand to hand as long as it would hold together, and to-day scarcely a copy is to be obtained in the Northwest. Mrs. Victor before her death prepared a second edition for the press, and it is to be sincerely hoped that the work will soon be republished. For, intensely interesting as the "River of the West" is, the chief value of the work does not lie in this fact, but rather in its value to the historian. Meek belonged to the age before the pioneers. It was the trapper and trader who explored the wilds of the West and opened up the way for the immigrant. That historians are just beginning to work up the history of the fur trade in the far West, the number of books in that particular field published within a year will testify; and such men, for instance, as Capt. H. M.

Chittenden, who last year published his "History of the American Fur Trade in the Far West," freely confess their indebtedness to Mrs. Victor's "River of the West" for much of their material; and so the stories of the Rocky Mountain bear killer, Meek, romantic though many of them are, check with the stories given by other trappers and traders and furnish data for an important period in the history of the Northwest.

In 1872 was published Mrs. Victor's second book touching on the Northwest, "All Over Oregon and Washington." This work, she tells us in the preface, was written to supply a need existing because of the dearth of printed information concerning these countries. It contained observations on the scenery, soil, climate, and resources of the Northwestern part of the Union, together with an outline of its early history, remarks on its geology, botany, and mineralogy and hints to immigrants and travelers. The preface closes with the prophetic words:

The beautiful and favored region of the Northwest Coast is about to assume a commercial importance which is sure to stimulate inquiry concerning the matters herein treated of. I trust enough is contained between the covers of this book to induce the very curious to come and see.

Her devotion to the Northwest and her interest in it could not be more clearly expressed than in the words just quoted. Her interest in the subject led her at a later date to revise "All Over Oregon and Washington," and to publish it again, this time under the title, "Atlantis Arisen."

In 1874 was published "Woman's War With Whisky," a pamphlet which she wrote in aid of the temperance movement in Portland. Her husband was lost at sea in November, 1875, and from this time on she devoted herself exclusively to literary pursuits. During her residence in Oregon she had frequently written letters for the *San Francisco Bulletin* and sketches for the *Overland Monthly*. These stories, together with some poems, were published in 1877 in a volume entitled "The New Penelope."

This last volume was printed by the Bancroft publishing establishment in San Francisco. The Bancrofts were an Ohio family of Mrs. Victor's early acquaintance, and Hubert Howe Bancroft laid before her his plan for writing the history of the Pacific Slope, and asked her to work on the part concerning Oregon. In 1878 she entered the Bancroft library, taking with her a mass of valuable material relating to Oregon history, which she had collected in the days when she intended to publish an Oregon history.

For eleven years, or until the completion of the Bancroft series, Mrs. Victor remained in this service. Here she did the crowning work of her life. At least six of the volumes which to-day pass as the works of Hubert Howe Bancroft were written by her. These are the "History of Oregon" in two volumes, the "History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana," the "History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming," and the sixth and seventh volumes of the "History of California." These latter two volumes cover the political history of California, and were prepared at the special request of Mr. Bancroft, though out of her regular line of work, for the reason that he considered Mrs. Victor especially strong as a writer on political subjects. Parts of the Bancroft "History of the Northwest Coast" and numerous biographies throughout the series are also from her pen.

The style of writing in all of these histories is clear and vivid, for Mrs. Victor had that most enviable of gifts, the ability to put life into her writings. As a historian she was careful, painstaking and conscientious. Her judicial habit of thought is especially prominent, an attitude toward things which she inherited in common with her kinsman, Judge Walworth.

That her work was done well is fortunate for the people of seven Northwest states. Her histories of six of them were not only the first to be published, but the only

histories in available form to-day. Her history of the seventh, Oregon, was the first history of this State ever printed which brought the account past the provisional period and which took up the subject for thorough treatment. The press reviews at the time the Oregon volumes were published all united in their praise, and many, taking them to be the work of Hubert Howe Bancroft, pointed out the superiority of this work over the previously published volumes of the Bancroft series.

The commendation was richly deserved, for time and time again Mrs. Victor has said that Oregon was her favorite subject, and upon this history she lavished an untold amount of care and labor.

After her return to Oregon she was employed by the state in 1893 to complete her "History of the Early Indian Wars of Oregon," a volume which was published by the State Printer the following year. She continued to write for the OREGON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY up to the time of her death. After a thirty years' study of the history of Oregon she stated her appreciation of the subject in a letter to the Secretary of State, in which she said that the history of no state is richer in the material that makes history interesting by combining the romantic and the philosophic elements. No state has had its early history better preserved or more clearly set forth, a result for which in large measure Frances Fuller Victor is responsible, and for which the people of Oregon owe to her a deep debt of gratitude. By her work on the history of the entire region west of the Rocky Mountains she has well earned the title once conferred upon her—the Clio of the Northwest.

Mrs. Victor's last published work was a small volume of poems printed in 1900, and selected from the many metrical compositions which she had written for newspapers and magazines through a period of sixty years. She was an able writer of essays and possessed an insight into the evolution of civilization and government rare, not only for an author of her sex, but for any author. Combining the qualities of poet, essayist, and historian, she occupied a position without a peer in the annals of Western literature.